



Centre for Innovative &
Entrepreneurial Leadership

The Communities Matrix

Introduction

The Center for Innovative and Entrepreneurial Leadership (CIEL) is a non-profit organization focusing on development & implementation of practical tools around community, entrepreneurship, learning, innovation, leadership, and community economic development. Through our work with the Business Vitality Index (BVI) it became apparent that rural communities required a tool to benchmark themselves in relation to others and determine what development strategies were indeed realistic. What resulted was the development of the Evolution of Communities Matrix, inspired by community characteristics that emerged from the BVI work. Significant variation was found in terms of the capacity of a community to realize identified courses of action. This is significant because communities run the risk of creating goals that are unattainable and may engage in economic development processes that are not appropriate to their stage of development (or level). The associated failure can create divisions in the community, erode very precious, hard –earned social capital, and may undermine long-term development efforts in the community. Through research and field experience a range of community attributes were identified and used to create a ladder of community stages of development. This accurate self-assessment is a critical step in building sustainable communities and communities that plan to stimulate entrepreneurship, innovation and realistic economic development.

The Communities Matrix Background

The Communities Matrix is a tool that has been evolving since 2002, designed to identify patterns and characteristics that were common to communities. The goal was a tool that could measure a community's capacity and identify how the community could move forward. The Matrix works with communities to help draw out the perceptions held by residents about their community and the assets and barriers that exist around community development. Feedback on the Matrix has been very positive as a tool that goes beyond purely quantitative indicators and furthers people's understanding of the stages communities go through. The Matrix has evolved with extensive research and feedback from community development practitioners, leaders, citizens and will continue to evolve. It is currently being used by a number of federal and provincial ministries, community economic development organizations and organizations across Canada.

Matrix Refinement

Thanks to funding from the Canadian Rural Partnership (CRP) and Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC), the CIEL team was able to further refine the Communities Matrix to ensure that it is applicable to a wide range of communities as a simple yet effective tool to support the vitality and development of communities. This refinement occurred through an extensive literature review coupled with workshoping the tool at several events across Canada.

Literature Review

The literature review enabled the CIEL team to confirm that the Matrix is a unique tool in the world of community, organizational and individual development practitioners. What makes it unique is the clear recognition of the importance of perceptions in helping to move communities, organizations or individuals forward. The literature review, which is attached both as an annotated summary as well as a standard bibliography, also found that there was nothing to contradict it as a theoretical model and tool for catalyzing development.

We were able to draw on the findings of the literature review to deepen our understanding of the process of change. The work of JM and JO Prochaska was particularly useful in identifying the five stages of change and their applicability to individuals, organizations and communities (see the Summary notes on “Why don’t continents move? Why don’t people change?” and “Stages of Change and Integrated Service Delivery”. Another important factor that came to light from the work of the Prochaskas is that each stage of change requires maintenance in order avoid a relapse. These concepts were incorporated into our work on refining the Matrix and will also be factored in as we develop the methodology for using the Matrix in self-assessments (whether at a community, organizational or individual level). The Matrix is a good contemplation and assessment tool, but it needs to be used with an awareness that there is a need for thoughtfully maintaining a certain level of action along with the action plans for moving the community forward. As an example, a sedentary individual turned jogger cannot aspire to run a marathon if regular jogging is not maintained. Maintenance of the norms requires effort and ongoing attention; failure to do so will lead the community back towards an earlier stage or relapse. Knowledge of the necessity for maintaining a current stage helps to inform the movement between stages; if change is desired and seen as a positive and appropriate step, there has to be strategic capacity as well. Strategic capacity is the necessary human, physical and financial resources to achieve the community’s vision.

Focus Group and Practitioner Feedback

Practitioner and community member input was received through work with three focus groups in each of Newfoundland, Ontario and British Columbia. These workshops, which involved a total of ninety-one people, brought forth a larger and more nuanced list of characteristics associated with the various levels of community functionality. This newly expanded list helped focus the development of the Matrix into seven key Categories and their associated characteristics (see attached Communities Matrix, Version 4.0). By deconstructing and then re-assembling the Matrix in this format, we have been able to reduce the value judgments associated with the previous strictly

hierarchical version that contained 10 stages (and 3 levels – struggling, functioning and highly functional).

Next Step

This deeper understanding of the processes and needs around change as well as a fuller inventory of characteristics will help in the next stages of the Matrix project. The next stage, conditional upon successful funding, involves one-on-one practitioner surveys, eliciting feedback around increasing the utility of the Matrix as a tool, any missing stages, characteristics or categories. This will feed into further refining the Matrix, especially as it relates to matching the categories and characteristics with the stages of development.

Simple and Complex Versions

The practitioner survey results will be used in conjunction with the results of the literature review and the refined Matrix to create two versions of the tool: a simple Matrix based on Version 4.0; and a more complex version which will include the broader range of community functionality stages as found in the earlier Matrix. The literature review and focus groups helped to confirm that these ten stages effectively describe the range of community functionality and development. The simple version can be used for communities wishing for only the simplest of tools while the more complex will allow for a deeper analysis.

Future Stages for the Matrix

In addition to refining the actual Matrix, the project will also include auditing the tools and resources available to communities in order to effectively match the best tools with the different stages of development and the aspirations of the community. This stage will also see the development of a methodology for using the Matrix so that it can be self-administered for the full benefit of the communities in question. The final stage of the Matrix development project will be field-testing in four communities across BC, two of them First Nations communities.